

The search for the new society

By Eugene Kamenka

MICHAEL HARRINGTON:
The Twilight of Capitalism
466pp. Macmillan. £8.95.

Karl Marx spent much of his life unwavering, predicting and demonstrating the coming collapse of capitalism. The hopes and predictions, especially as reflected in the Marx-Engels correspondence, have their ludicrous aspect. They suggest a desperate clutching at every financial scandal, recession and crisis as a sign of doom. This has remained part of the less intelligent side of the Marxist-socialist tradition of discussion. It is to be found in Michael Harrington's *The Twilight of Capitalism*. Marx's demonstration, presented unidirectionally, completely, but often brilliantly, in the thousands of pages that make up the unfinished manuscript, *Capital*, is still worthy of admiration and respect. Paul Samuelson's contemptuous dismissal of Marx as an economist—"a minor post-Ricardian, Marx was an autodidact cut off in his lifetime from competent economists and scholars"—does round us of the destructive isolation from first-rate criticism in which Marx lived. But the judgment, as Harrington says, is harsh and Samuelson has modified it since. From the end of the nineteenth century onward—since Tönnies, Weber, Sorokin, the young Croce, Michels, and Pareto—serious thinkers about economy and society have consistently found in Marx great questions to be answered and important conclusions to be tested. His oeuvre as a whole still stands at the beginning, if not at the end, of any serious discussion of modern society.

If Marx was one of the founders of the study of modern society, he has become the central figure of one of the world's great modern religions. Men and women have used his work, as Angelica Balabanoff says she did, to invest their deepest hopes and longings with the dignity of an irresistible historical imperative. This is true even of those who did not simply deny Marx and turn his thought into dogmatic orthodoxy. They too used his thought as ideology—indeed, as the very paradigm of what ideology as a *Weltanschauung* lending to action ought to be: a fundamental critique, both moral and logical, of contemporary society; a delineation of a

future society free of fundamental or serious deficiencies (such as alienation or "contradiction"); and a description of the mechanism (the logic of capitalism and the historical role of the proletariat) by which the transition from the debased present to the glorious future would take place.

It is almost a hundred years since the death of Marx. In that period, we have seen many "Marxisms" and many interpretations of Marx. The variety is both historically and socially conditioned. It is encouraged by the competing strains in Marx's own work, by his attempt to synthesize conflicting and contradictory socialist hopes by his recognition of complexity, his disparate ambitions and, simply, by the significant, indeed central, historical changes that took place in the Europe of his lifetime and which were, at least to some extent, recognized and reflected in his work. Constantly, we find Marx speaking against himself, retracting or altering the content of some of his most general propositions. Given this, and given the ideological interest in and appeal of his work, it is no wonder that interpretations of Marx, scholarly and unscholarly, have achieved the volume of an industry.

The sociologist Daniel Bell has argued that in our modern post-industrial society there is a growing conflict between a social structure, characterized by functional rationality, and culture, characterized by an "antinomian justification of the enhancement of self". Contemporary Marxism and interpretations of Marx's thought enter this conflict, which as past "Marxisms" and interpretations of Marx have betrayed the conflicts of other ages. The most intelligent of contemporary Marxists attempt to treat a tightrope between emphasis on functional rationality, the work ethic and acceptance of the values of science and technology on the one hand, and emphasis on Marxian humanism, opposition to "alienation", "dehumanization", and "the fetishism of commodities" on the other. At the same time they seek to bring into Marxism, as their predecessors have done, the scientific, scholarly and philosophical fashions of their own age: phenomenology and structuralism, talk of "paradigms", "scientific revolutions" and "the interrelation and interdependence of subject and

object". The radical enthusiasms of the late 1960s have been replaced by much more metaphysical noise about Marx, man and society. But there is no doubt that the reception of Marx into the academy, the growing cultural pluralism of Western Communist Parties, and the "interventions" of Althusser and of serious Italian Marxist thinkers, as well as the debate between these and the growing number of Marxian humanists, have all raised immeasurably the standard of analysis and discussion of Marx's work.

Those who consider themselves Marxists are among the most devoted and indefatigable contributors to this analysis and discussion, but their Marxism, contrary to their own belief, gives them no special status within it, no privileged insight into the master's works, and no more important contributions to appraising Marx's work as a whole still come from those who see themselves as standing in a respectful but fundamentally critical relationship to his thought. But contemporary Marxism, in the United States and Europe at least, has become very considerably more "open". What still distinguishes Marxists from other serious students of Marx's work is their acceptance, as the central pivot of their thought, of the three crucial elements that make up Marxism. These are the belief that the "logic", the "contradictions", of capitalism will bring about its downfall; the belief that a society is possible which will be rational in its ordering of production, distribution and exchange and in which "alienation" and "dehumanization" will have been overcome; and the belief that there is a mechanism or force that will accomplish the transition from the fallen state in which we live now to the glorious future that is, at least in principle, our promised heritage and that this mechanism or force is to be found in the hands of the proletariat.

Michael Harrington is in this sense Marxist and a socialist. His *Poverty and the United States* attests a good deal of attention; he is, to judge from this new book, an attractive writer and an intelligent man, but he writes—as Marxists and socialist activists always seem to do—much more ideologically, much

more selectively and polemically, much less as though he were grappling with problems to which he did not know the solution beforehand, than the neo-conservatives, liberals and others whom he is always accusing of being ideologists. The sneers at the ways of the academy, at what he takes to be "its" conception of economics, sociology and Marx, may be fashionable in Mr Harrington's circles; they display, nevertheless, the same degree of intellectual honesty and care as street-corner evangelism and soap-box oratory. Mr Harrington rightly praises Marx for always arguing against the strongest case; he himself, when dealing with the opponents of socialism, always breaks off the argument at the point where it becomes difficult for him, always ignores the actual or possible rejoinders to his position.

The result is a book that is in parts admirable but as a whole irritating and disappointing. *The Twilight of Capitalism* is a graceful title that Harrington's work is unable to justify. As the fundamental theme of the book, he has no more original or interesting story to tell us than that of the widely recognized conflict between the predominantly private and fragmented organization of production on the basis of the profit motive in capitalist society as a whole and the recognition of the need for planning, "rational" resource-allocation and control which characterizes the modern undertaking in its internal direction and science and technology as modern ideologies. This tension which Marx was among the first to recognize and which Josef Schumpeter made the theme of his *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, does not by itself imply that the working class will rise in rebellion against capitalism or that it will be the bearer of the new socialist ideology of the future.

Harrington, after insisting that Marx did not believe in the pauperization of the worker under advanced capitalism, makes no such claim. On the contrary, as he tells us, Marx was a coalition of trade unionists, farmers, ethnic minorities and intellectuals, he completely skates over the question of what class or social movement, on the basis of its existing conditions, will usher in the new society. He says simplistically that Marx him-

self gave here and there and he opts, in the end, for a view of the relationship between base and superstructure, production in the material world and society at large, economics and culture, that owes a great deal to structuralism. The result is a superficially sensible reading of Marx which takes account of his recognition of complexity, dismisses entirely the Communist *Manifesto* account of the development of human history, and no general key to history but studied only the specific historical formation of capitalist society, in which the economic had indeed moved unaided and openly to the forefront of social affairs. *Capital* is to be read as a preliminary, simplified "model"—as dealing with actual complexities.

The intelligence of all this is nurtured by Harrington's insistence on constantly talking about the "Marx", the "authentic" Marx, and his refusal to follow the implications for some of the fundamental Marxian hopes and claims of this much less deterministic, more open and condenser, reading of Marx and his method. Harrington recognizes, again correctly, that a Marxist cannot allow a truly important role to contingency, and concede significant interaction between economic base and superstructure, as both Marx and Engels do, at the same time insist that "in the last analysis the base will triumph. Yet Harrington's own attempt to resolve the question of the relationship between contingency and necessity, primarily in terms of the accidental or contingent deriving its significance and subsequent history from the nature of the "system" into which it is absorbed, carry the discussion no further forward than Plekhanov and Kautsky had done ages ago, and present no more agonizing solution. The extent to which Harrington has not emancipated himself from a subtler version of Marxist determinism and orthodoxy to which his knowledge of every-thing except contemporary Marx and his disciples. This is especially evident in his discussion of the economic history and of the origins and growth of capitalism, where intelligent and knowledgeable neo-Marxists, like R. S. S. Neale, have found Marx's detailed account of the process of capitalism, and where his ignorance of any detailed knowledge or work.

Nevertheless, Harrington's Part 1, despite its fundamental deficiencies, is not an unimpressive piece of work; it summarizes fairly and well the complex and open interpretation of Marx's method and work. Part 2, "The Future of Marx or The Crisis", is a loose composition of some very familiar socialist attacks on the relation between the United States government and big business, on inequality inherent in the tax structure, and on the inability of the society organized on the

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profit motive to plan "rationally" for the "needs" of "society" or the productive process as a whole and life. Harrington's belief that he has given some aspect of the powerful and convincing demonstration of these points—a "secret history"—by revealing the close and not always creditable collusion between the United States government and the oil companies is ludicrous, almost as ludicrous as Marx's own belief that Palmerston was in the pay of the Russians. It is not uncharacteristic of those who talk about the way that capitalism is unable to solve "its" problems that they never consider the way in which these problems would be solved in a non-capitalist society, and that they avoid the extremely awkward comparison with the Soviet Union and China by insisting that these societies are not genuinely socialist either, and, in any case, too backward to provide an example. On the other hand, it must be said that Harrington, for all his rejection of a technological interpretation of Marxism, keeps emphasizing Marx's own stress on the historic role of the bourgeoisie and its development of the means of production. He is presenting socialism as a humane and democratic sort of possible future, in conditions of comparative affluence.

Harrington's sensible and sensitive mixture of Marxian humanism with accurate account of Marx's belief in the ultimately liberating effects of technological progress does however enable him to write some very effective pages indeed on the possibility of abolishing the social inequalities and inaugurating a socialist humanism in an economically deprived and backward society. It is thus, Harrington argues, that Che Guevara, caught in an irreconcilable conflict in his own thought, virtually chooses death and that Castro turns to Soviet Communism.

For all the care with which he tries to construct us a new Marx to guide us into the society of the future, in his analysis of contemporary American capitalism and in the social policies he recommends, Harrington is a state-of-the-art, conventional pragmatist. He knows that social change comes from the top as well as from below and he does not pretend to himself that the future is necessarily glorious or that the collapse of capitalism will be a relief. His choice of all that immitable, namely his attempt to have things both ways while assuming, without demonstrating, precisely Marx as being "really" concerned only with the capitalist social formation, and because his own interests are limited to the explanation and criticism of capitalism as Marx saw it, he is as very worst in considering the kind of socio-sociological issues raised by Raymond Aron and Daniel Bell in turning serious attention to the direction in which the trends in existing Western industrial post-industrial democracies are leading.

The very rhythm of Rousseau

By Robert Wokler

STEPHEN ELLENBURG:
Rousseau's Political Philosophy
An Interpretation from Within
335pp. Cornell University Press. £12.

Stephen Ellenburg subtitles his account of the political philosophy of Rousseau "An Interpretation from Within". But it is nothing of the sort. On the contrary, it is a dispute about the meaning of Rousseau's ideas which has been waged by scholars and critics alike since there it does not really make much sense. From at least around the beginning of this century that dispute has been focused upon the supposed collectivism (or, more recently, totalitarianism) of Rousseau's political beliefs, on the one hand, and his individualism (or liberalism), on the other—terms which, according to Dr Ellenburg, have been conceptually wide of the mark. For Rousseau, he argues, was neither a collectivist nor an individualist, since he did not accept the false antinomies between the individual and society and between the private and public spheres of human action which, at the heart of that distinction, Dr Ellenburg offers us the principles which he regards as more central to the true meaning of Rousseau: first, non-individualism, and second, anarchism.

By "non-individualism" Dr Ellenburg means to encapsulate what he regards as the social character of Rousseau's image of the individual, the "organic relatedness" and "common corporate" in which the being of Rousseau's public person is embodied. By "anarchism" he means sometimes equated with "radical egalitarianism"—the means of absolute negative liberty that constitutes Rousseau's only political dependence and the subjection of persons to the rule of others. Dr Ellenburg cautions us not to employ these terms merely as labels which would deprive our subject of its pleasurable but very real, none the less, naive in his view, to locate and relate those crucial movements... which constitute the very rhythm of Rousseau's intelligence.

The rhythms are disastrously off-beat, however, quite simply because the crucial movements are those of Dr Ellenburg's own score. For all their anachronisms the impressions of Rousseau as individualist or collectivist doctrine rejected by Dr Ellenburg have at least been cast in recognizable moulds. Scholars who regard the theory as collectivist have, with widely varying degrees of enthu-

siasm, followed Vaughan or Crocker in insisting that for Rousseau men could only achieve self-mastery if they entered into certain corporate political relations; that the sovereign power which they establish jointly yields absolute authority over them in the state; that political malfeasance or transgression of the dogmas of the civil religion may be put to death; or that whenever refuses to obey the general will can be "forced to be free". On the other hand commentators who interpret Rousseau's political thought as individualist or liberal have instead followed Haymann or Dwyer in stressing that for Rousseau men enjoy natural rights in virtue of their humanity; that the social compact requires not a renunciation of freedom but an advantageous exchange... which is liberty possible; that the authority of civil laws is circumscribed by the limitations of the laws of nature; or that the legitimate powers of the sovereign are limited by public utility.

Still others—perhaps the majority of interpreters—have followed Beau-lavon or Pflanz in contending that Rousseau's profound and subtle, if often obscure, conception of the bond between individual and authority contains elements of both collectivism and individualism kind and a few have followed Lolgh in finding us that Rousseau's allegedly totalitarian notion of absolute sovereignty implies nothing so much as the primitive notion of an impartial rule of law that is upheld in Western democratic states. All these approaches offer us at least the prospect of a coherent interpretation of the sense of Rousseau's main political ideas, and in the light of passages drawn from his work some have proved convincing and others not. But the central tenets of Dr Ellenburg's alternative perspective seem unable to fit even any conceivable implications of Rousseau's theory, and his outlook constitutes not so much a misinterpretation of the texts it covers as an irrelevance.

Leaving aside the fact that Rousseau never employed the term "individualism" either to support or attack his theory, Dr Ellenburg's pronouncements about "non-individualism" are credible only if we accept that Rousseau meant to challenge a crucial assumption of liberal philosophy to the effect that persons are self-contained and discrete individuals having private interests or rights that do not issue from their common life. Liberals, according to Dr Ellenburg, believe that "individuals make, but are not made by, political society"; that society, in turn, is no more than a numerical aggregation of its members; and that the activities of government, however justified, are always an intervention in the sphere of personal freedom. In fact, however, these principles have not all been upheld by the male liberal thinkers—not even by Locke, Bentham, and Mill, whom Dr Ellenburg discusses at greatest length—and Rousseau nowhere imputed such ideas to his theoretical adversaries.

The critical mistake which he imagined had been made by Locke, for instance, was of a different kind, and it pertained not to his definition of the individual but to his abstraction of some social institutions, especially property and the conjugal bonds of man and wife, from our civilized to our natural state, that was for Rousseau not the narrow and private but too complex and artificial, since it assigned to mankind generally a set of attributes which were derived from some historically acquired forms of mutual dependence. Since Rousseau neglected to accuse Locke—or indeed anyone else—of advocating a false doctrine of "discrete individuality", there is not much point in ascribing to him, as his central thesis, the refutation of an idea which apparently never crossed his mind.

The notion of anarchism which Dr Ellenburg imputes to Rousseau, if anything, even less plausible. Since again it matters little that Rousseau never actually employed the term, it is not to matter more to Dr Ellenburg that he did in fact condemn "anarchy" as "abuse of government" which followed the dissolution of the state at the end of its legitimate rule. Of course Rousseau was committed to a fundamental principle of man's moral autonomy, and most anarchists have upheld such a principle too. But much of his political theory is concerned with the rules of association and the forms of responsible government under the authority of the state which alone enable us to realize our autonomy as moral agents, while anarchists have characteristically rejected such rules, governments, and states, precisely because in their view the principles of political authority and personal autonomy are not compatible at all.

If only Dr Ellenburg had addressed himself directly to the ways in which Rousseau attempted to reconcile these precepts he might have come much closer than he does to an interpretation "from within" and perhaps could have enlightened his readers about the genuinely important concept of moral liberty which for Rousseau made such an accord possible. Yet that concept is set aside by Dr Ellenburg because he supposes it to be a misleading Kantian idea, and he instead presses his case for Rousseau's teaching imperative, which he imagines is most fully obtained in the "permanent and unmediated participation" of citizens in a legislative "daily plebiscite". Also, the idea of daily plebiscites is not a neutral, but a doctrine either; nor, for that matter, is it Rousseau's view, since he regarded it as inconceivable even in the most democratic states "that the people should remain continually assembled to deal with public affairs".

Occasionally, and particularly when Dr Ellenburg loses sight of the underlying strands of his interpretation, his remarks are in fact cogent and clear. Despite its major shortcomings Rousseau's *Political Philosophy* offers readers some illuminating observations about Rousseau's attitude to the Corsicans (a courageous people whose devotion to the soil and family life could help to overcome their banditry) and his advice to the Poles (whose impending partition might prove "a misfortune to the dispersed members of the nation" and "a benefit to the body of the nation"). It provides a fair summary of *Emile*, a thoughtful account of the political significance of *Claveau* in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and—perhaps above all—several useful comments on the importance of Rousseau's idea of *les moeurs*, and the general simplicity of morals, manners and customs which he believed to be required in the best possible states. These are extensive and replace with references to much secondary literature, while the main text itself is full of lengthy quotations which form an admirable bibliography of Dr Ellenburg's familiarity with the political thought of Rousseau's major writers in French thought. Yet for all their weight the references and extraneous quotations place the burden of the interpretation upon them, and it is sad to report that a work of such obvious scholarship is so severely damaged by its central theme.

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Causes and their credentials

By Peter Winch

TED BENTON

Philosophical Foundations of the Three Sociologies. Dordrecht, 1976. 225pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul. £6.50.

It is easy to recognize in the abstract that the questions one asks will determine the form of the answers one gives them; and that preconceptions of which one will probably not be aware may be leading one astray in one's choice of question before investigation has even started. It is much less easy to bring those preconceptions into the light of day and evaluate them. For reasons which lie deep in the nature of the subject, this applies much more strongly within philosophy than almost anywhere else.

Ted Benton is sensitive to some of the ways in which philosophers' investigations tend to be distorted in relation to other kinds of scientific inquiry. In particular he is concerned to show how comparison between modes of explanation in the social and natural sciences respectively have been stria-

jacketed by uncritical acceptance of, in a broad sense, "positivist" conceptions of natural scientific explanation, which he rightly sees as seriously inadequate. This is not merely true of accounts of social science which are themselves uncritical of the kind of accounts to which they refer. It is also true of such accounts. As one of the targets of this criticism I feel a strong position to agree with it. On this point, and at a certain level, Mr Benton makes out a thoughtful, well-argued and well-documented case.

He thinks that what is principally lacking here is recognition of the inoperative nature of the "general" scientific explanations, as distinct from the mere subsumption of particular phenomena under empirically established general laws. He argues out the distinction by way of a lucid and sensitive exposure of the complex internal conceptual structure characteristic of scientific explanation.

On the other hand—and this is why I have said he is successful only at a certain level—he is less, and insufficient, attention to the deeper epistemological preconceptions which have made it difficult to form a clear view of the credentials of the notion of "causal

mechanisms" and which have inclined philosophers to allow this notion eventually to collapse back into that of "empirical laws". There are issues here which cannot be handled by analysis of the concepts of the kind to which Mr Benton largely refers. They belong to a more primitive level of epistemological perplexity, a level at which he shows less sensitivity: the less revealing for being only an aside. "I may, after all, be only dreaming that I sit here staring desperately out of the window trying to think of an example."

It is precisely through attention to the subtleties involved in our inclination to say such things when philosophizing that deeper connections between thought and experience begin to emerge. These connections are surely not captured by the modified Althusserian account of science as a "mode of production" which Mr Benton sees as a remedy for the inadequacies of both positivism and humanism. There may indeed be some way of conceiving the "utility" of science which will not blind us to the difference between the cases of science and what we call "different cases of science" but it is hard to see Althusser's response as any less simplistic a conception of such a unity than

the positivist conception for which Mr Benton wants to substitute it. And if the trend of humanist conceptions seems to be away from a view of science's utility, well, at least they might have made it more clear that he shows himself to be to the radically different sense carried by such expressions as "causal mechanism" when applied to social development rather than to say, the theory of gases. The same applies to his use of such phrases as "materialist" and "instruments of production" lifted out of economic analyses in his account of the acquisition of knowledge.

The book has grown out of what was obviously a very good course of lectures. Books have a greater air of solidity and authority than lectures. This one is certainly going to be used a great deal by sociology students preparing themselves for examination in the philosophy of their subject. They are likely to find it very helpful for this purpose, if they can avoid repeating such occasional post-modernist ideas as "The English conception of the social hierarchy" and "bourgeoisie" mirrored in Locke's compromise in epistemology. I am less sure that it is going to be testing enough to stimulate them to their own thinking.

The marabouts in the market-place

By Ernest Gellner

Mr Brown's book, unlike Mr Kieckhefer's, does not contain any excursions into the really distant past. This in itself is significant: the historic past of Safé as a city-state, an autonomous community of citizens, does not seem alive in contemporary consciousness. Although Saléens apparently do occasionally invoke social ancestors, their values do not seem to be economic or disident. During the colonial period, however, Safé enjoyed the reputation of being a virulently nationalist town. The basis for this attitude had been laid early.

As a description of Muslim urban life, Mr Brown's study certainly deserves to stand alongside the works of Roger Le Tourneau, Ibn Lapidus, and Ibn Khaldun. However, unfortunately this, in his effort to offer an overall description, he has not pursued any one of his themes to the point where fully rounded conclusions would emerge. This is not, as I would speak, a *thèse à thèse*. If there is an underlying plot, it is that *plac change, plus c'est change*. The changes are social, economic and conspicuous in the twentieth century had already been in full swing in the nineteenth. For instance, the nineteenth century was the period of the long ago noted by Ibn Khaldun, of government based on privileged tribes. Instead, the bureaucracy, growing in importance, was manned by a kind of *bourgeoisie* drawn from the towns such as Salé.

At the same time, Mr. Brown is convinced that an increase in economic differentiation took place associated both with greater commercialization ("petrification") and with *comprador* trade. He quotes Le Tournau's observation that the conflict occurred not between classes but between classes, or rather "changing and ephemeral oppositions of class". Mr. Brown also finds no clues in any rural social history within São Paulo, until the 1850s, to have been relatively undifferentiated in socio-economic classes and cultural categories.¹

The term "clan" is not to be taken literally either:

"I found no evidence of collective action by any particular group... between the various powerful extended families... men who controlled different groups held together by mutual interests, not ties of kinship... of allies or clients centered around one man... promised no permanence by its effectiveness, or at most, the lives of the individuals concerned."

Mr. Brown also notes that the national culture is "a mixture of urban culture, but observes "the spread and conquest of a culture and the national integrity that is claimed as having been lost in a very great extent of Morocco."

While his overall description of Salé is excellent, the individual thistles he dwells with could have been taken further. It is not clear what he can do so, possibly in connection with his more recent work in other parts of North Africa. Clearly, the Saléitins and Sherakins belong to the same group: patronage and fluid associations prevail, though the domestic lineages in Boujad seem to have had a greater significance and a more restricted fluidity in time. Referring to Salé seems to have his Salé somewhat surprisingly—and to have had marked antipathies in the territory of the Sherakins. The author's scholarship on the other parts seems to have had better proof in Salé. But, as if to underline the continuity of the Salé region, the Sherakins and Ekkéris regions when the Saléitins are in political protest in 1930 and the movement towards Boujad and Salé. The author's anthropological work in the local locale of one of the governing religious orders.

